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The New York Times _____
 The Washington Times _____
 The Wall Street Journal _____
 The Christian Science Monitor _____
 New York Daily News _____
 USA Today _____
 The Chicago Tribune _____
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Director is key to a law-abiding CIA

Robert Gates, the deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, says the agency has taken several steps to prevent the kind of abuses that occurred during the reign of his late chief, William Casey. The changes Gates mentioned are necessary and welcome, but only partly reassuring. Casey's misdeeds were numerous and appalling, and reforms within the agency must be accompanied by vigilance from Congress.

Gates says that, among other things, the CIA is making a "more rigorous review" of each proposed covert action "to evaluate whether it makes sense" and to ensure that it is lawful. In a break with tradition, agency officials involved in intelligence analysis are now being asked to review proposed secret operations, Gates asserts.

The changes were occasioned by new disclosures by Bob Woodward, a Washington Post editor, that Casey as CIA director became impatient with what he believed was a sluggish CIA bureaucracy and personally organized several secret operations. The most shocking of these was the attempted murder of a Shiite Moslem leader in Lebanon in 1985. The botched attempt killed 80 innocent people.

Casey was described by subordinates as a man who wanted "offense, not defense; boldness, not caution," very much in the mold of Lt. Col. Oliver North, the National Security Council aide many Americans came to admire during the congressional investigation of the Iran-contra scandal. There are times when bold action is required at the CIA. But the wise and effective leader makes intelligent and discriminating choices to solve specific problems, just as the skilled mechanic chooses the right tool for the job.

If boldness is sometimes required, the true test

of valor and patriotism is often the willingness to be careful. Casey never seemed to understand that. There are zealots in virtually any organization, and giving them free rein at the CIA is as dangerous as surrendering the agency to those who are never willing to break the mold of tradition and safety.

If they become permanent parts of the decision-making process, the changes Gates describes will help prevent the kinds of free-lancing that Casey ordered. But Congress has an indispensable role to play, too. The most important single thing it can do to help the CIA is to assure, through painstaking confirmation proceedings, that future CIA directors are men and women of unquestioned integrity.

While administrative reforms can help, if the CIA is headed by a zealot, then zealotry in the bureaucracy will surely follow. And zealotry at the CIA can too easily produce lawlessness and disaster.